

Pilot No. 4 : Enhance Citizen Participation

Focus: Local Planning Process

Purpose:

To determine whether strategies exist to make citizen participation more effective and meaningful and document how communities are making the process more meaningful

Participants:

State of Pennsylvania; Miami Beach, FL; Westchester County, NY; City of Buffalo, NY

Pilot Description:

Working groups report that, at both the local and State level, public hearings do not provide adequate, effective vehicles for public involvement in the Consolidated Plan. However, public hearings are statutorily required and eliminating them would require statutory relief. To enhance public participation, some communities are supplementing public hearings with other avenues for public participation—broadcasting hearings on radio and TV, encouraging e-mail comments from citizens, and posting Consolidated Plans on local government Web sites.

This pilot would consider strategies that enhance citizen participation. A Consolidated Plan Technical Assistance provider would look at existing strategies. In addition, the pilot would consider if different strategies are necessary to improve citizen participation at the State versus local levels and the impact of these changes on public participation in the Consolidated Plan process. Another issue for this pilot group is addressing statutory requirements for public hearings. Participants would work with HUD to determine what statutory changes would be needed to allow alternatives to traditional public hearings.

Summary of Grantee Pilots:

State of Pennsylvania will replace one of two annual in-person public hearings with a virtual public hearing (chat room format) held over the Internet and the format of the plan will be changed to be more readable and concise to facilitate public understanding. Grantee expects to submit plan by December 31, 2003.

Miami Beach, FL will explore ways to streamline the presentation of data, i.e., Internet opportunities, cable access programming, and informational services to enhance the citizen participation process.

Westchester County, NY plans to replace their hard copy document with CD ROM-oriented Internet viewable edition. They expect that providing the information electronically on CD-ROM and on the county's website will better convey the county's

needs, the housing market and the selected strategies over the 5 years. They expect that the public and agencies will be better engaged and provide better feedback. They will measure attendance at meetings and visitors to the website.

City of Buffalo, NY will explore techniques that might improve their current citizen participation process and options to incorporate a Citizen's Review Board into the process.

Pilot No. 4 Status as of June 30, 2004

Miami Beach, FL prepared and submitted a Consolidated Plan that explored ways to streamline the presentation of data, i.e., such as use of Internet opportunities, cable access programming, and informational services to enhance the citizen participation process. The hearings and the workshops were advertised in the Miami Beach *Neighbors* section of the *Miami Herald*, and on the City's cable television station.

Westchester County, NY demonstrated the format they used for the non-housing community development plan at a meeting of the National Association of County, Community and Economic Development Association and the HUD Field Office. The multimedia approach uses a variety of photographs, tables, and charts to show illustrate community development needs that were developed through a series of meetings in various parts of the county. The plan is posted on the Internet and is available at: . <http://www.westchestergov.com/planningdocs/ConsolidatedPlan/ConsolidatedPlan04/WEB%20SITE/IntroPageHTML/conplan04.htm>.

The County reached out to its 11 county departments, PHAs, Section 8 offices, citizen groups, municipalities, non-profit agencies, and conducted public meetings to assist in identifying the non-housing needs and CDBG-eligible strategies to address them. The new format streamlined the document and process. Required tables were retained in the new plan, but other methods of illustrating these needs enhanced the significance of this information by enabling comprehension of this information on a wider scale.

State of Pennsylvania Department of Commerce and Economic Development conducted its public hearings in a live "chat room" format that resulted in measurably greater participation than the formal hearing used in previous years. Comments were also received in electronic format that was both quicker and more cost effective than traditional mailings.

City of Buffalo, NY established a new Citizen's Planning Council that held its first meeting on May 20, 2004 to discuss the process and schedule for the development and approval of its Capital Improvement Program and Annual Action Plan. A public forum dealing with the priorities set forth in the city's comprehensive master plan and 5 year consolidated plan is scheduled for be held on August 11, 2004 to gauge citizen concerns toward the determination of project/program funding. A meeting was previously held in March 2004 with members of local citizens groups, City, Common Council and HUD

representatives to discuss the process, recommend changes, and work toward process improvements.

